B.C.'s NATIVE STONES POINT BUILDING TREND

By GINNIE BEARDSLEY

IN A LAND OF ROCKS and Christmas trees, as B.C. has sometimes been called, it is most suitable that the new Government House should present to the world a face of British Columbia stone.

The plan to use our native granite (one of the finest and most lasting of structural materials in the world) is responsible for what is probably the largest stone work project since the building of the legislative buildings, the old post office, the public library, and the Dunsmuirs' castles.

For most of the years between, stone work was little called for, and so it has come about that the young man who follows his stonemason father's footsteps is rare in rock-rich British Columbia.

An exception is Ed Guizzetti, whose Nanaimo contracting firm won the Government House contract over Vancouver competition. Ed's father, Louis, a Canadian since 1920, who taught his son the trade which all the Guizzetti men had followed in Italy as far back as can be remembered, came out of semi-retirement here at a young-looking 60 to join other stonemasons at the Government House job.

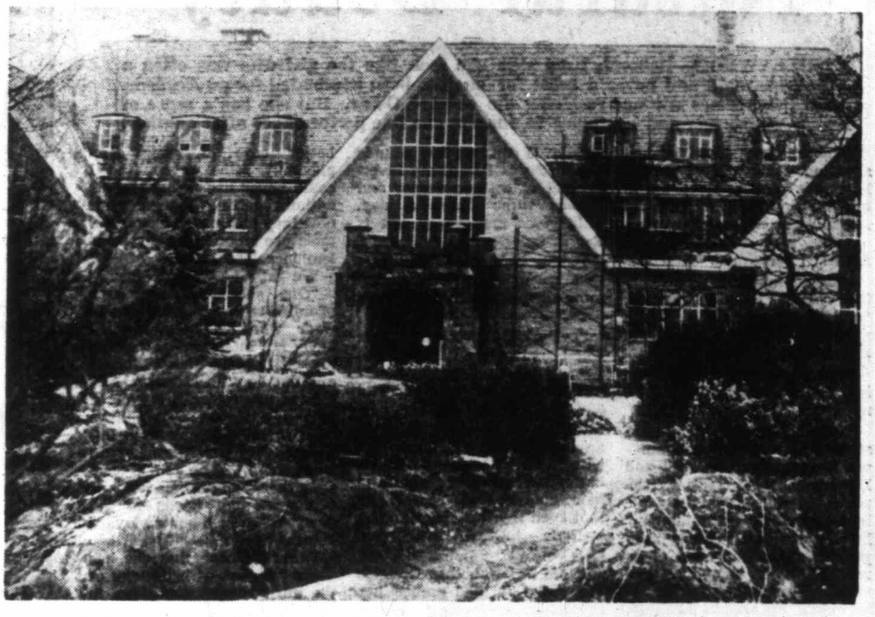
The pink granite which forms about six per cent of the total exterior wall area was discovered as a building material by the elder Guizzetti. Working as far north as Campbell River, Mr. Guizzetti noticed increasing amounts of this handsome and workable material on the beaches from Qualicum onwards. A man with whom he fell into conversation while at work on the Courtenay post office turned out to have done considerable prospecting, and was able to lead Louis Guizzetti to the source, a few miles north of Campbell River. It may be seen in several local buildings: Government House, of course, a new motel on Belleville Street facing the CPR ferry terminal, and in Mr. Guizzetti's own home at Gordon Head.

OTHER GRANITE used in Government House comes from Nelson Island in Johnson Strait. It is of two types: grey, of which 3,200 cubic feet have been used, and blue, which is used in equal proportions with the pink to add emphasis and color to the pattern in which the stone is laid. The grey granite weighs about 165 pounds to the cubic foot; the colored types are slightly heavier at 170 pounds.

Pink and grey granite were split on the spot by the stonemason's age-old "plug and feather" method, slightly speeded up by the use of a new Swedish drill. The blue granite, which does not have the natural "seams" which dictate direction of splitting, had to be sawn with diamond-edged blades (also from Sweden) at Mortimer's 82-year-old Monument Works. Chimney caps, steps, and slabs requiring special texturing were also finished there.

All of the granite has been laid in what is called an ashlar pattern, four inches thick, over the reinforced concrete wall structure. (No chances are being taken on another Government House fire).

This is a modern gold assay bar, made available to some Canadian coin collectors recently. The numbers in the top left hand corner state that the bar is more than 999/1,000 pure gold — 24 carat — and the weight, 1.6 ounces, is given on the bottom. The name of the assay company which produced it is in the triangle. Value of the bar is about $65. None of the similar assay bars used in B.C.'s early days has been found.



The old stone portico of the Government House which was destroyed by fire two years ago, was incorporated into the stone construction of the new residence. This aspect of construction is a good example of the stonework which lends the building dignity, beauty and a quality to challenge the years.

OUTLINING THE SOUTH WALL of the ballroom wing, and forming a line at the first-floor level, Haddington Island volcanic rock — whose correct name is "andesite" because it was first found in the Andes—has been used as a trim.

Another beautiful B.C. stone which will show to advantage at Government House is black slate from Jervis Inlet. This was split in thickness varying according to need from half-inch to two-inch in Vancouver before-shipping to the building site. It paves terraces, patios and steps.

Stone which received considerable advance publicity is a showpiece of gold-bearing quartz which came from the Cariboo as a result of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce "gold escort" goodwill tour during the Centennial. The 300-pound block was split into three pieces and set in the granite den fireplace on the ground floor, with a ceremony to mark the event.

As befits a building of dignity, Government House is well supplied with fireplaces; one of granite in the entrance hall, and others with marble hearths and surrounds in the main drawing room, the dining room, the small drawing room, and the chatelaine's room. The marble used is practically the only stone in the building which did not come from B.C.

Most of the stonemasons, like the marble, come from countries where the art of stoneworking has been a continuing way of building through the centuries. From Italy come contractor Ed Guizzetti's cousin and partner Nino, Johnny Zuiz, Fred Rossetto, and of course Ed's father.

Zeig Walduber and Ray Gasser (the latter has lately moved to the U.S.) came from Austria.

Hans Espersen and Rudy Rasmussen came to B.C. from Denmark.

Arthur Bloomfield, from England, has been 28 years in Canada, and Les Burnett came from Scotland five years ago.

Most of the others average between five and ten years' Canadian residence, and all but two are under 40, which augurs well for the continuance of stonemasonry in rocky B.C. Youngest of the crew is 19-year-old Johnny Henson, son of Victoria contractor Sam Henson and grandson and namesake of one of Victoria's oldest surviving stonemasons, a man who started building with Victoria's granite 50 years ago. For four months, six cutters and five stone-setters were kept constantly busy. On the finish work with the slate, often only two were employed.

Although Government House is the biggest stonemasonry job on Vancouver Island in some years, it is interesting to note that present architectural trends indicate increasing use of stone in portions of better quality homes. The Guizzettis, who cover the Island, report greatly increased demand for both structural and ornamental stone work in the past half-dozen years. Louis Guizzetti, remembering the extensive limestone construction in his native Italy, hopes it may be possible to locate stone combining easy working quality with weather-resistant durability, so that stone work may be brought into a more competitive position in the matter of price.

With the inspiration of B.C.'s natural beauty, use of talents attracted here and others developed on the spot, plus full exploitation of the fine materials nature has provided, we have the potential for a bold, imaginative building style. Government House is a worthy example.

"Absolutely NO!"